

THE *EUTHYPHRO*

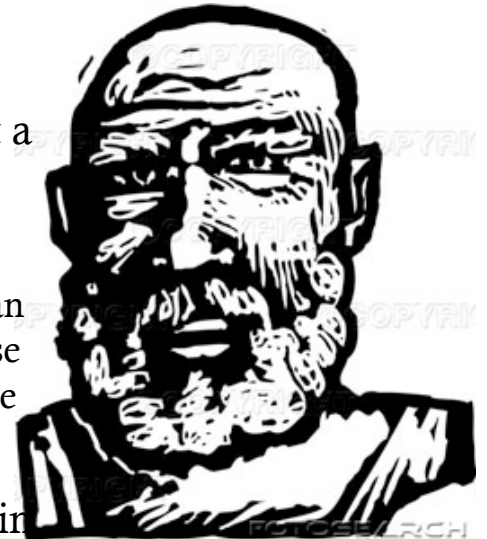
Background and Context...

Just before Socrates' trial and *Apology*...

- » Euthyphro explains that he has come to prosecute his own father for murder. However, the facts of the case are complicated, thus making it a bit difficult to see where 'piety' and 'justice' lie.

On the one hand, Euthyphro's father caused another man's death, and it is generally considered pious to prosecute murderers. On the other hand, (i) the man Euthyphro's father killed was himself a killer, (ii) Euthyphro's father did *not* cause the victim's death directly, and (iii) it is generally considered impious to prosecute (or otherwise shame) one's own father.

- » Socrates asks Euthyphro whether he is afraid of having *acted impiously* in bringing his own father to trial. Euthyphro answers that he has "expert-knowledge" of piety and impiety, and so does not fear having acted impiously.
- » Socrates then asks Euthyphro (facetiously, as quickly becomes clear) to teach him what piety and impiety are, for Socrates realizes that possessing such knowledge might enable him to answer Meletus' accusations.



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Three Important Concepts (Summary)...

Expert-Knowledge – the *technē* analogy

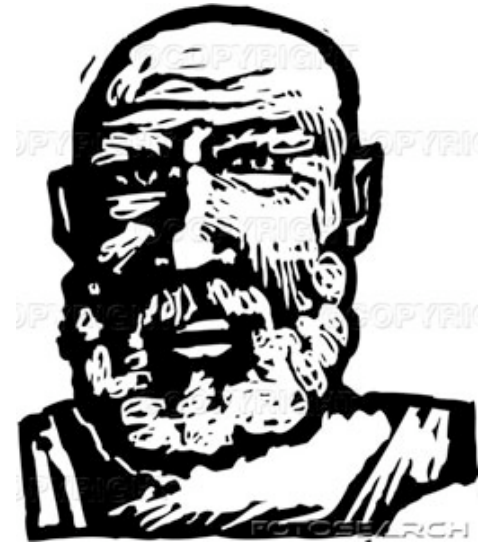
- » An individual may be considered an expert with respect to X if and only if that individual is able to (i) adequately define X (i.e. provide an account of X) and (ii) teach his knowledge of X to other individuals. Moral expertise (*technē*) thus consists in one's possessing 'expert-knowledge' (or 'wisdom') of the virtues...

Socrates' characteristic method – the *elenchus*

- » From the Greek *elenchein*, meaning to “cross-examine”, “test”, “refute”
- » Serves at least a two-fold function/purpose: (i) method of *refutation* and (ii) method for *exposing ignorance* (or detecting fraud)

Socratic definitions – the ‘*what is it?*’ question

- » Until you know *what a thing is*, you can't answer any other questions about it... A ‘Socratic definition’ is supposed to be an adequate answer to a ‘what is it?’ question. So, knowledge of X depends on being able to adequately define X.
- » Socrates' primary concern is trying to answer ‘what is it?’ questions that pertain to the moral virtues (‘courage’, ‘temperance’, ‘justice’, etc). For, according to Socrates, in order to be *virtuous*, one must (first) *know* ‘what virtue is’



A helpful summary of things by C.C.W. Taylor...

“In these (early) dialogues Socrates is presented for the most part not as a systematic or authoritative teacher, but as a questioner and enquirer. His enquiries are all focused on questions of conduct, broadly understood, and frequently consist of attempts to reach an agreed definition of some fundamental value such as courage, or goodness in general. Typically Socrates is depicted as engaged with one or more people in conversation on some specific, often practical topic, which leads to the more general issues just mentioned. Socrates elicits the (genuinely held) views of his interlocutors on these issues and subjects them to critical examination, conducted with a minimum of philosophical technicality, and utilizing other assumptions, usually of a common sense kind, which the parties to the discussion agree upon. Usually this procedure reveals inconsistency among the set of beliefs (including the general thesis of proposed definition) which the person examined holds, which is taken as requiring the abandonment of the thesis or definition. Frequently the dialogue ends with the acknowledgement by Socrates and the others that, having failed to settle the general issue raised, they are unable to proceed further; they thus end up in a state of aporia (‘perplexity’). This procedure of enquiry... and its frequent aporetic outcome are in keeping with Socrates’ [mission and] denial that [neither] he [nor his interlocutor] possesses any wisdom (‘expert-knowledge’). [For] it is the mark of an expert to be able to define the concepts in the area of his expertise and to expound that area systematically, neither of which Socrates [nor his interlocutor] can do” (C.C.W. Taylor)

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Different Kinds of Definitions...

Etymological definitions

- » Defining X in terms of the *linguistic origin and development of the component parts* of X (*philos* 'love' + *sophia* 'wisdom' = philosophy 'the love of wisdom')

Lexical definitions

- » Defining X in terms of the *standard linguistic usage* of X

Stipulative definitions

- » Defining X by *stating what you mean* by X ('in this essay I will be using the term "slumpbuster" to mean *x, y, z...*')

Ostensive definitions

- » Defining X by means of *pointing to, or demonstrating* X ('that's a "chair" right there...' [pointing to the thing in the corner])

Enumerative definitions

- » Defining X by *citing examples* of X ("actor" =^{df} Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, etc)



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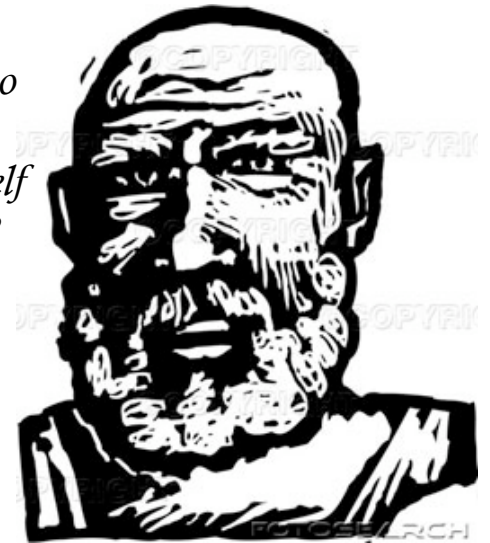
Defining 'Piety' (Round #1)...

The set up (5c-d)...

"Now then, in the name of Zues, tell me what you were just claiming to know so clearly. What sort of thing would you say the holy and the unholy are, whether in cases of murder or of anything else? [...] isn't the pious itself the same as itself in every action? And conversely, isn't the impious entirely opposite of the pious? [...] Tell me then (Euthyphro), what do you say the pious and impious are?"

Euthyphro's 1st proposed definition (5d)

- » 'Piety' =^{df} "what I am doing—namely, prosecuting the wrongdoer"
- » 'Impiety' =^{df} "not prosecuting the wrongdoer"



Socrates' criticism of the proposed definition...

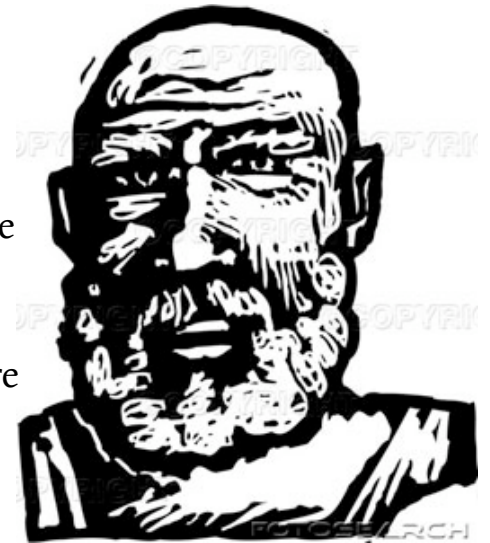
- » This is not the right *kind* of definition... Apparently, Euthyphro has not understood the instructions that Socrates gave at 5c.
- » Socrates did *not* ask for list of things/actions that are pious (and impious). Rather, Socrates wants to know the *single idea* (or 'form') of piety itself... *that which is the same in every pious thing/action.*

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Understanding ‘Socratic Definitions’

Essential (or ‘conceptual’) definitions

- » Socrates thinks that only a *particular kind* of definition will be able to adequately answer the crucial ‘what is it?’ question—namely, definitions that accurately describe the ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ of the thing in question
- » In other words, the appropriate answer to a ‘what is X?’ question is supposed to be a definition that *specifies the nature* of X-ness itself... one that *explains what X-ness really is* or *consists of in and of itself*...
- » That very *form* or *idea* that makes X, X... the *thing in virtue of which* all X-things are X... that *is the same in every particular X-thing*
- » Some examples... What is an *even-number*? In other words, what is the essence or nature of *even-number-ness*? What is water? What is the *essential nature* of water?



Conceptual analysis...

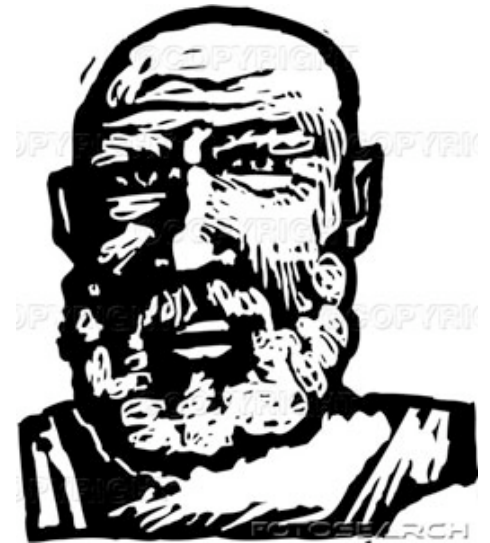
- » Providing such an essential definition is often referred to as ‘conceptual analysis’ and is usually accomplished by spelling out the set of *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions for the concept/thing in question.
- » X is by definition a _____ if and only if _____ , _____ , _____ , etc

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Defining 'Piety' (Round #2)...

The set up (6d-e)...

"Do you remember, then, that what I urged you to do wasn't to teach me about one or two of the many pieties, but rather about the form itself, by virtue of which all the pieties are pious? You said... that it was by virtue of one characteristic that the impieties are impious and the pieties are pious [...] Teach me what that characteristic itself is, in order that by concentrating on it and using it as a model, I may call pious any action... that is such as it"



Euthyphro's 2nd proposed definition (7a)

- » 'Piety' =^{df} "what is loved by the gods"
- » 'Impiety' =^{df} "what is hated (i.e. *not* loved) by the gods"

Socrates' criticism of the proposed definition...

- » Socrates rejects the definition as inadequate on the grounds that the gods often disagree about what they love and hate. As such, the definition allows that the same thing could be (simultaneously) both pious and impious... "*both* loved by Zeus, *but* hated by Hera" (8b)

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Understanding ‘Socratic Definitions’

What went wrong, exactly?

- » Although Euthyphro’s definition was of the right kind—namely, one that attempted to specify the essence or nature of ‘piety’, the proposed definition still failed to ‘apply to’, ‘refer to’, ‘pick out’ or ‘capture’ the right things.
- » In other words, the definition failed to specify that which is *essentially characteristic* of “all and only” pious things.

The ‘Captures condition’ (CC)

- » Simply put, the ‘captures condition’ is the requirement that the *definiens* (that which is doing the defining) be *neither too broad nor too narrow* in its scope. The ‘captures condition’ can be formally stated as:

$X =_{df} \{ABCD\}$ only if (i) every instance of X has properties $ABCD$ & (ii) everything that has properties $ABCD$ is an instance of X (or alternatively: only X ’s have properties $ABCD$).

- » Let us refer to (i) and (ii) as the *All x ’s Requirement* and the *Only x ’s Requirement*, respectively.



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Defining 'Piety' (Round #3)...

The set up (9c-d)...

"If you like (Euthyphro), let's suppose that all the gods consider the action unjust, and that they all hate it. Is that, then, the correction that we're now making in the account, that what all the gods hate is impious while what they all love is pious... Is that how you'd like us to define the pious and the impious?"

Euthyphro's 3rd proposed definition (9e)

- » 'Piety' =^{df} "what is loved by *all* the gods"
- » 'Impiety' =^{df} "what is hated (i.e. *not* loved) by *all* the gods"

Socrates' criticism of the proposed definition...

- » Socrates asks Euthyphro an interesting question: *Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?*
- » Socrates offers several examples to try help illustrate his point... a 'carried thing', a 'led thing', a 'seen thing'...
- » Now, what about *the pious*? Are pious things loved by the gods *because they are pious*, or for some other reason?



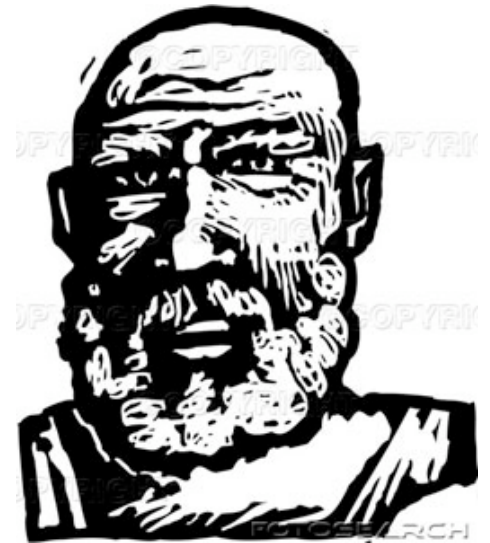
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Understanding ‘Socratic Definitions’

The ‘*explains condition*’ (EC)

- » Socrates seems to be placing another (necessary) condition on any proposed Socratic definition of X. Let’s call it the ‘*Explains condition*’.
- » Simply put, the ‘*Explains condition*’ is the requirement that the *definiens* give a *causal account/explanation* of the *definiendum* (that which is being defined). The ‘*explains condition*’ can be formally stated as:

$X =_{df} \{ABCD\}$ only if every instance of X is in fact an X *because* it has properties ABCD.



So what went wrong, exactly?

- » On the one hand, Euthyphro agrees (with Socrates) that the gods love what is pious *because it is pious* (and for no other reason). But, on the other hand, according to Euthyphro’s 3rd proposed definition, the essence of ‘piety’ is the property of ‘being loved by all the gods’
- » So here’s the problem: the *essence of ‘piety’* (the thing that makes a pious thing pious) is not the same as the *essence of ‘being loved by all the gods’*

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Understanding 'Socratic Definitions'

Criteria for an *adequate* Socratic definition of X

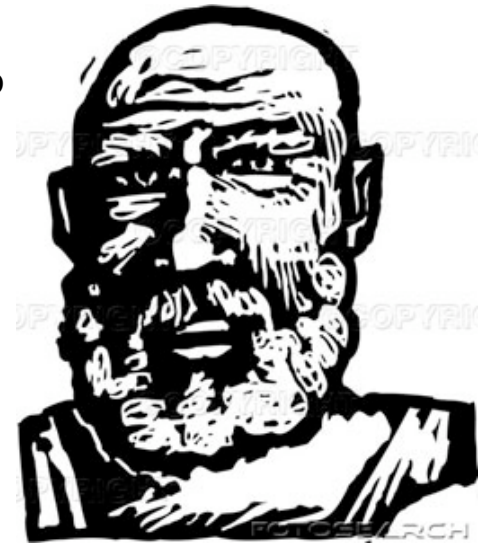
- » So it looks like (CC) and (EC) are both *necessary* conditions that need to be met for any adequate 'Socratic definition' of X

however...

- » Neither (CC) nor (EC) are individually *sufficient* for any adequate 'Socratic definition' of X

so...

- » In order for a proposed 'Socratic definition' to be an adequate 'Socratic definition' of X, it must satisfy BOTH the '*captures* condition' AND the '*explains* condition'.



So our principle for all *adequate* Socratic definitions of X can be stated as the following:

For all proposed 'Socratic definitions' of X, a 'Socratic definition' *D* is an adequate 'Socratic definition' of X if and only if *D* satisfies both (CC) and (EC)

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Understanding ‘Socratic Definitions’

Here’s another way of trying to understand what, according to Socrates, went wrong with Euthyphro’s last attempt to define piety...

- » Recall that the suggestion that Euthyphro puts forward at 9e is that ‘piety’ is by definition “what is loved by *all* the gods”. But, at 10d Socrates gets Euthyphro to agree that pious things are loved by all the gods *because they are pious*... and that pious things are *not* pious *because they are loved by all the gods*. But, this admission is Euthyphro’s downfall in the discussion because now it looks like the essential property of ‘piety’ (i.e. that which makes a pious thing a pious thing) is not the same thing as the essential property of ‘being loved by all the gods’ (i.e. that which makes a god-loved thing a god-loved thing)
- » Consider the following argument designed to illustrate the point more thoroughly...
 1. That which is loved by all the gods (the god-beloved) is god-beloved, because all the gods love it [10a-c].
 2. The gods do not love the god-beloved, because it is god-beloved [10a-c].
 3. The gods do love the pious, because it is pious [10d].
 4. The pious is not pious because the gods love it [10d].
 5. If the pious = the god-beloved, then the god-beloved is god-beloved because it is god-beloved [11a; by (3)].
 6. If the pious = the god-beloved, then the pious is pious because it is god-beloved [11a; by (1)]
 7. Hence, the pious is *not the same* as the god-beloved [11a; by (5) and (2) and by (6) and (4)].